DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 028 345 AC 003 957

By-Raymond, George M.; Shiffman, Ronald

The Pratt Center for Community Improvement: A University Urban Action Program.

Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Pub Date 67
Note-14p.; Reprinted from Pratt Planning Papers, January 1967
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.80
Descriptors-*Community Education, Community Leaders, Decision Making, Ghettos, Interagency Cooperation, *Neighborhood Centers, Publications, *University Extension, *Urban Extension, *Urban Renewal
Identifiers-Bedford Stuyvesant, *Pratt Center for Community Improvement

The Pratt Center for Community Improvement was founded in Brooklyn in 1963 by Pratt Institute. Its aim was to help equalize the knowledge level of city and community representatives concerning issues in urban renewal, and to gain the confidence of local residents and enhance their participation in decision making. Participant education and technical assistance, local and city-wide conferences, a survey of Stuyvesant Heights, a vest-pocket park program, and steps toward a Model Cities program have been among the principal activities to date (1967). The chief result has been that, of all New York City ghetto areas, Bedford-Stuyvesant is the one most ready to receive a Model Cities program. Results have also underlined the importance of consistency of purpose, comprehensive goals, community organization, political neutrality, flexibility in rate of progress and in funding, concentration on operational rather than basic research, improved communication with the municipal bureaucracy, and the special position of the Center within Pratt Institute and in relation to city departments. (ly)

ED028345

Reprinted from Pratt Planning Papers, Jan. 1967

George M. Raymond and Ronald Shiffman

The Pratt Center for Community Improvement: A University Urban Action Program

"I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it away from them, but to inform their discretion by education."

Thomas Jefferson

Democracy, as Winston Churchill once remarked, is a most troublesome form of government, but it is the best there is. To make democracy endure, it must be constantly renewed so as to make its institutions and processes meaningful to all members of each new generation. And, as Thomas Jefferson never tired to point out, at the very base of the whole edifice is education, for it is an axiom that democratic processes cannot unfold among people who are ignorant of their purposes and procedures.

In 1954, stung by repeated failures of even well-conceived urban renewal projects, the federal government decreed that all renewal activities must in the future take place with full citizen participation. A few years later, in 1964, opening the nation's official "war on poverty" the Economic Opportunities Act went even further and required that the "poor" be given maximum feasible direct participation in all programs affecting them. These federal steps represent significant milestones on the way toward the humanization of what had until then been an ever-growing urban bureaucracy, relatively isolated from the people who are its ultimate constituents. Experience in one community after another, however, clearly proved that "citizen participation" can be a futile exercise, devoid of all but, perhaps, symbolic meaning, unless the citizens who are asked to participate have a reasonably thorough understanding of the alternatives available to them and of the basics of the programs in which they are asked to participate. It was the desire to bring about a certain degree of equality of knowledge between city and community representatives that was responsible for the establishment of the Pratt Center for Community Improvement.

The Center was started in 1963, as the Pratt Community Education Program, with the assistance of a $94,000, three-year grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. During the year or two just prior to its founding, the City of New York had experienced some of the most violent upheavals in the stormy history of its controversial urban renewal program. Jane Jacobs, even before the publication of her regrettably slanted "Death and Life of Great American Cities", had led the embattled bohemians of West Greenwich Village to victory over the prostrate bodies of the City's leading housing and planning bureaucrats. Encouraged by her triumph against a project of doubtful parentage and intent, Jane Jacobs crossed the East River into Brooklyn and helped a few articulate groups in Cobble Hill defeat a project conceived by the community, whose purpose was solely that of helping its residents rehabilitate their homes.

The fact that the people of Cobble Hill allowed themselves to be stampeded into protesting a proposal which the City had advanced in response to the community's own initiative greatly puzzled the head of Pratt's Department of City and Regional Planning. Only a few months

AC003957

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

earlier, the Department had completed a student project consisting of a preliminary plan for the rehabilitation of a section known as Cobble Hill. The study had been requested by the residents of the community (banded together as the Downtown Area Renewal Effort, or DARE). Their efforts had been assisted by a small grant from the Fred L. Lavanburg Foundation. The plan had been presented to an enthusiastically approving audience which packed much of the vast Brooklyn Academy of Music. And despite the preliminary plan's general commitment to maximum feasible rehabilitation with the aid of low cost loans, and despite the substantial support it enjoyed throughout its preparation, a majority of those who attended the hearing held by the Board of Estimate on whether it should authorize the filing of an application for federal planning funds successfully pressured the Board into inaction.

The ultimate meaning of this fiasco was unmistakable: unless public understanding could be achieved, there could be no objective evaluation of the merits of individual urban renewal proposals. The inevitable final result would be that New York's desperately needed housing and renewal programs would be brought to a total standstill. This eventuality would not have proven too distasteful to various and sundry aspiring young lawyers, who found in the fomenting of emotionally charged opposition to urban renewal a sure-fire issue in their battle for political recognition; nor would the demise of renewal have displeased a host of self-styled leaders who tried to use people's fear of change as a stepping stone to social revolution or to the resurgence of the more virulent forms of so-called "conservatism". To informed New Yorkers, however, the prospect of total inaction in regard to the enormous problem presented by its million people who still live in the slums was totally unacceptable. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund Trustees shared this view, and agreed to fund what was intended to be an essentially educational program.

In 1962, when the request to the Fund was first prepared, the idea of "urban extension" work by universities was still in its infancy.* The particular context which first motivated the Pratt Department of City and Regional Planning to involve itself institutionally in the problems of the community established clearly the initial outlines of its activities. Its prime concern was with physical development and with the need to eliminate the obstacles which then prevented its unfolding.

As he had always been, the head of the program was fully cognizant of the impact on the social structure and individual lives of urban renewal activities.** But, unlike its effect on many of the City's most concerned civic leaders, the realization that physical development has social implications did not paralyze the Pratt group into inaction. The slums were still there, all-pervading, too obvious and too overwhelming in their stunting impact on their unfortunate victims' lives to be ignored. And so, while fully cognizant of the fact that "decent homes in suitable environments" cannot cure all of the nation's social ills, the Center acted on its conviction that the elimination of slums can greatly assist in their solution. The staff also believed, along with Gunnar Myrdal, in the immense job-creating potential for slum dwellers inherent in a major slum elimination program. And, finally, everyone was also fully aware of the fact that, once set in motion, physical improvement programs inevitably trigger a multitude of social advances, which no amount of moral exhortation could set in motion in the absence of a program which brings the problems of a given area to the surface.

---

*Where, according to a recent report by the Ford Foundation, it still largely remains. Of nine programs funded by that foundation, the only one which has been recognized to be reasonably successful was that conducted by ACTION-Housing, Inc., of Pittsburgh, an organization not connected with any institution of higher learning. The other programs were conducted by eight land-grand universities. ("Urban Extension" A Report on Experimental Programs Assisted by the Ford Foundation, Ford Foundation, Office of Reports, New York, 1966.)

**During the previous decade, the author, who founded and who still directs the Pratt Center for Community Improvement, had served as consultant on some 75 urban renewal projects in almost as many communities throughout the Middle-Atlantic and several Southern states.

Program Orientations

As they have evolved to date, the Center's activities have been carried out on three levels.

The major area of concentration deals with technical assistance to "target" or recipient communities, such as the Negro ghetto in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. In these areas, the program offers technical assistance to community leaders, public and private agencies, and civic associations, and assists in the coordination of community efforts through broad dissemination of reports, a monthly community newspaper, and liaison with city and other public officials.

The efforts of ghetto residents to rebuild and rehabilitate their neighborhoods and their people can only succeed if the rest of the community accepts their objectives as valid. In view of the enormous confusion which has reigned in the City for the last decade on this subject, a major educational effort directed at the city as a whole is essential. To this end, the Center has involved the most respected and most highly organized city-wide citizen organizations (such as the Citizens' Housing and Planning Council of New York, the Park Association, the Council for Parks and Playgrounds, the Association of Neighborhood Councils of Greater New York, etc.) in the joint sponsorship of conferences and other projects dealing with issues affecting the entire city in its metropolitan setting. In addition to its well-attended four annual conferences, the Center has attempted to disseminate new ideas through the preparation of a substantial amount of educational and reference material on such subjects as citizen participation, social planning, government organization, parks and recreation, landmarks preservation, and so on.

The third program orientation involves direct participation in grass-roots activities and the development of physical demonstration projects. The end objective of this phase of the Center's activities is to help the community attract public notice and the maximum outside public and private assistance in all possible forms, from all possible sources.

The Participant Education Process

The communities with which the Center has become involved are directly affected by urban decay, including substandard housing, inadequate public services, inadequate school and recreation facilities and programs, poverty, unemployment, poor transportation, chaotic land use, and the whole discouraging array of social and economic problems which pervade underprivileged areas. In its early days the program attempted to provide relatively formal learning experiences, including lectures, seminars, and other classroom education. It soon became quite clear, however, that the "students", already tired out by a long day's work, could hardly be expected to enjoy going to school (all classes were held at night to accommodate the needs of the participants who were otherwise employed). The program then switched to a more directly goal-oriented approach, best described as a "participant education process". This process, which consists of continuous participation by the program staff in local meetings and projects, has proven to be a much more effective approach to working with community groups than the initial attempts to reach residents through adult education or the normal variety of university extension programs. The "participant" education and technical consultation process becomes imperceptibly an integral part of the community's own efforts and activities, and consequently assumes a much more meaningful role than any formal education or distant consulting relationship possibly could. Rather than saying "I recommend that you do thus-and-so", the technician thus becomes able to say "I think we should proceed along the following lines". To succeed, this process requires total flexibility of program and scheduling so as to enable the staff to adapt almost instantly the educational and technical services provided to the needs of a particular group or project.

In essence, the "participant education process" aims to achieve the following goals:

1. A basic public understanding of housing, planning, urban renewal, and related programs.
2. A clear public understanding of realistically available alternative programs and the probable consequences of each (including that of inaction), in order to give the community a greater degree of flexibility and choice in determining its course of action, and to enable it to eschew the paralysis which frequently results from its inability to recognize, and choose among, mutually exclusive objectives.
3. The development of easily understood and precise statements of the specific steps agreed upon as necessary to achieve the desired results in connection with each community program.
4. The clarification and merging of major community interests, the resolution of intergroup conflicts, and the neutralization of baseless or purely chauvinistic local biases within the community in order to obtain the broadest possible consensus and maximize the chances that a substantial number of the area's major problems will be solved.
5. The broadening of the area of contact among community groups to achieve maximum community involvement as soon as possible.
6. The development of effective techniques for reaching the official decision-making structure and for eliciting a positive response therefrom.

Evolution of the Program

Specific program activities which have been undertaken consonant with these goals are as varied as they are numerous, and can best be understood by describing the events which led to their development.

In early 1964, the Church Community Services Commission, an organization of ministers representing a cross-section of Bedford-Stuyvesant churches, asked the Center to undertake a study of Stuyvesant Heights, a 16-block predominantly, although by far not exclusively, middle-income area. This area adjoins a proposed urban renewal project known as "Fulton Park". The ministers' principal concern centered on the possibility that the renewal project would have a negative impact on its sounder surroundings, including the Stuyvesant Heights area, by accelerating an already sharply perceptible out-migration of long-time resident leadership families from their community. As might be the case in any human community, but perhaps felt more acutely in a ghetto area, the sudden exodus of even a few families from Stuyvesant Heights might well have left an almost total leadership vacuum. The Fulton Park Community Council, composed of residents of the proposed renewal project area, many of whom are low-income homeowners, feared renewal because to them it meant the obliteration of their homes and neighborhood by uncontrolled bulldozers. The Fulton Park Community Council was a member of the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, an exceedingly well-organized group representing 93 member grass roots organizations. The Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council's primary interest at that time was in the establishment of Youth-in-Action, the community's official anti-poverty agency, and in coordinating the efforts of its member organizations toward the achievement of a few specific community-wide objectives, among which the construction within the community of moderate rental housing and of major community facilities (such as a hospital and community college) were paramount. The intimate and vital interest of these organizations in their area did not blind them to the need for evolution and change; indeed, each in its own way had long been actively pursuing that goal. Unfortunately, however, because of the City's almost incredibly poor and insensitive performance in recent years, most of these

groups were suspicious of the renewal program and were highly skeptical of the city's motivation.

The completed report* showed Stuyvesant Heights to be an area of still excellent homes, with a high ratio of resident home ownership, but in great danger of rapid deterioration as a result of influences from immediately beyond its borders. Its call for prompt city action was endorsed by, among others, Robert C. Weaver, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Publication of the report was followed by a call for assistance from the Fulton Park Community Council, which desired to draft its own survey. This became essential due to the suspicion of the City's motives engendered among local residents by the abortive attempts of the City Planning Commission's Community Renewal Program to conduct such a survey. The City's efforts had broken down because of its inability to communicate clearly the intent and meaning of the survey and the ultimate purpose of the questions it proposed to ask, and of its failure to clarify the role of the Community Renewal Program's community organization staff in relation to the City and the community.

The local residents' technical understanding of the renewal program was minimal, and what they did know was based on hearsay or on impressions gained from fleeting acquaintance with some of the City's other projects. Their fears led them to oppose the program, and thereby to sacrifice the community's best available chance of launching it on a course toward the changes it so obviously needed. After a series of broadly representative community meetings, however, and after the Fulton Park Community Council requested the Center's assistance, the participant organizations accepted the Center's offer to help them investigate whether renewal alternatives which they might find more acceptable than the ones with which they were familiar were available, and whether they could be applied to their particular needs. To this end, the Center, in conjunction with the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, scheduled a series of field trips to Baltimore and New Haven, cities whose pace-setting rehabilitation-type renewal programs had achieved national prominence. The objective of these trips was to help residents develop an understanding of renewal based not on vague impressions of poor local renewal projects, but on their actual experience of projects developed elsewhere by more dedicated and better informed leaders who were determined to act in accordance with not only the letter, but also the spirit of all applicable laws and regulations. Over 100 members of the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, the Fulton Park group, and various other organizations took part in these trips.

Local Conferences

Word of the favorable impressions gained by all participants filtered throughout the community, and produced an immediate positive reaction. It soon became quite obvious, however, that the continued persistence of the accumulated misinformation and confusion regarding the purposes and potential of existing housing, planning, and urban renewal programs among the thousands of interested local residents who had not participated in the trips would nullify all efforts to initiate positive programs for the Central Brooklyn area.

To consolidate support behind an action-directed approach to the physical and social improvement of the community, the Center assisted the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council to mount a series of community-wide conferences on the "War on Poverty", and on Housing and Urban Renewal. Each of the two conferences were attended by over 500 community leaders. In November, 1964, the Housing and Renewal Workshop of the "War on Poverty" Conference

*"Stuyvesant Heights: A Good Neighborhood in Need of Help," Community Education Program, Department of City and Regional Planning, Pratt Institute, 1964.

hammered out a comprehensive program for the **Total Renewal and Rehabilitation of Bedford-Stuyvesant.** The recommended approach was similar to that which was ultimately incorporated in the Federal "Model Cities" (first known as the "Demonstration Cities") program, 18 months later. The program was enthusiastically embraced by the conference.

The program for the total renewal and rehabilitation of Bedford-Stuyvesant requires massive federal, state, and city assistance, and it was clear to all concerned that its initiation could not be expected for some time. To maintain momentum of civic involvement in community problems in the meantime, the Center helped local groups to tackle more immediately realizable objectives. As an example, one of the prime sources of civic concern was the prevalence of vacant, burned-out, and abandoned buildings and rubbish-strewn lots in the community, which constituted a major health and safety hazard for the children who used them as play areas, as well as for neighboring residents in general. A survey undertaken by the Center jointly with the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council revealed the presence of 378 vacant lots and 346 abandoned buildings scattered throughout Bedford-Stuyvesant. Many of these were city-owned. The strong efforts made to date to enlist City and Federal assistance in eliminating these health hazards and eyesores have been responsible for the filing by the Housing and Redevelopment Board of an application for a Federal Demolition Grant, covering almost the entire community. The survey data was also used as a basis for the formulation of a list of preferred sites for vest-pocket parks.

The Vest-Pocket Park Program

The City agreed to clean, surface, and fence five vacant city-owned areas and lease them to the community, at $1 per year. The Center felt that this step presented an excellent opportunity for the outside world to supply concrete evidence of its concern and desire to help ghetto residents develop first class residential neighborhoods. The assistance of the noted landscape architect, M. Paul Friedberg (an instructor in the Pratt Institute School of Architecture), was secured and upwards of $20,000 in grants was obtained from the Avalon and New York Foundations, Mays Department Stores, and several personal and family donations. The Center then proceeded to design and, using local unemployed labor, to actually build two vest-pocket parks laid out so as to provide an imaginatively conceived, continuous multiple-use play area. In the case of one of the two parks, the Center had to purchase and turn over to the City a strategically located privately owned lot which was needed to round out the site. The Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council worked with interested block associations and, in conjunction with them, co-sponsored the park. This meant that the participating groups agreed to accept the responsibility for supervising recreation programs and for the operation of the two parks. Maintenance of the facilities was entrusted to the Neighborhood Youth Corps.*

Other Studies

Another major problem affecting the community was the huge superfluity of liquor stores—as many as four to a corner,—which had been licensed for the Bedford-Stuyvesant area. The Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, with the help of the Center, collated data on liquor store sites and presented it formally to the State Liquor Authority and Governor Nelson Rockefeller. This effort was followed up by continuous pressure to prevent the granting of additional licenses for liquor stores in the area. In one instance, the Center assisted the

*Recent cutbacks in the Neighborhood Youth Corps program have left the question of maintenance unresolved, with the financial burden unfortunately falling on block associations which are simply unable to meet its cost. Pending resolution of this problem, possibly through assumption of responsibility by the City, maintenance has been provided by the Center.

Pratt Area Community Council to mount a successful action program designed to prevent the leasing of a vacant store for a liquor facility.

Another activity which the Center undertook at the request of the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council was a survey of subway and bus routes in Bedford-Stuyvesant, which proved the inadequacy of existing service in the area. Armed with the results of the Center's study, the Council, Brooklyn CORE, and other action agencies presented the community's case to the Transit Authority and gained improvements in routes and free transfer points for its residents.

Yet another example of the kind of successful activity in which the Center engaged jointly with community groups is its staff's involvement in the preparation of background data for hearings held by the State Insurance Superintendent on the unavailability of fire insurance in the area. These hearings, as was the case with the State Liquor Authority, were requested on the basis of data compiled by the Center, and resulted in a commitment by the Governor to introduce remedial legislation in the 1967 session of the State Legislature.

The Center also recognized the need to expose important political figures and their key staff assistants to a first-hand acquaintance with conditions in the area. One of its most successful activities is a sort of constant "Cook's Tour" of the most dilapidated buildings and the most junk-strewn alleys as well as of areas of strength which illustrate what most of the community could still become. These tours, conducted in cooperation with the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, have given a true view of the conditions which plague the community to such leaders as Senators Robert F. Kennedy and Jacob S. Javits; the former Chairman of New York City's Housing and Redevelopment Board, Herbert B. Evans; the most sensitive and effective of New York City's seven Planning Commissioners, Elinor C. Guggenheimer; etc. Each of these visits resulted in the establishment of continuing liaison between the Center and the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council and the officials involved, which, in turn, has led to far-reaching results.

Toward a "Model Cities" Program

The level of sophistication of local understanding of the issues led the Bedford-Stuyvesant leadership to stake out, clearly and forcefully, an early claim on a Model Cities program in their community. In its original form, the federal legislation would have limited the application of the program to only one neighborhood in each of the 60 to 70 cities which were expected to participate. In statements and editorials, the community pointed out that, while one such program, covering a vast portion of the blighted areas of a smaller community might be sufficient, New York City needs at least two such programs, i.e. in Harlem and in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The community also pointed out that it was ready to receive such a program since it had espoused a similar approach as long as 18 months prior to the Administration's announcement. Finally, the community was also able to show that the quality of the basic building types in the area (three-story brownstones, covering less than 50% of their lots), the generally still good or fair condition of most buildings, and the prevailing high rate of home ownership, all contributed to a much greater chance of success here than in the dense five- and six-story tenement areas elsewhere. (This latter argument was advanced not in order to deprive any other area of the City of the assistance which many so desperately need, but in order to strengthen Bedford-Stuyvesant's claim for a simultaneous parallel program.)*

---

*Over two years earlier, the Center had pointed out that the magnitude of New York City's problems was such as to require a special approach. The suggestion was made that Congress look upon the City's vast concentration of poverty as another example of a "depressed" region, requiring the same kind of reaction as that which launched the Appalachia program.

The community's new-found voice, as articulated at its area-wide conferences and in its publications—in all of which it was assisted by the Center—, as well as by the Center itself in its own publications and annual conferences, was finally heard. The first to respond, and still by far the most helpful to date, has been Senator Robert F. Kennedy. Deeply impressed by the conditions to which he was exposed on his tour in February, 1966, and also fully convinced that a prompt community-wide effort in Bedford-Stuyvesant could prove that this nation can still find a way to solve the problem of urban decay, he charged his own staff with the responsibility of advancing the work already so well underway. Among the many instances of his constructive assistance to the community, the most far-reachingly significant is the recent establishment of two non-profit corporations. The first is a non-partisan, broadly representative local Community Development Corporation (the **Bedford-Stuyvesant Renewal and Rehabilitation Corporation**).* The second is the **Bedford-Stuyvesant Development and Services Corporation**, whose directors include some of the foremost members of the American business world, under the chairmanship of Andre Meyer, Chairman of the Board of Lazard Freres & Co. The role of this Corporation is to stimulate and facilitate the investment of resources from the private business community, in conjunction with foundation and government support, in the physical and economic rebirth of Bedford-Stuyvesant. Pursuant to a grant from the Ford Foundation and the Edgar M. Stern Family Fund, to be administered by the Center, the Development and Services Corporation has secured the part-time services of Boston's famed Development Administrator, Edward J. Logue, to plan and program its initial activities.**

City-Wide Conferences and Publications

Ever since its active community organization program began, the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council has been most anxious to spread, as widely as possible, news about the fast-multiplying instances of positive activity in the community. This was felt to be particularly necessary in order to counteract the demoralizing adverse publicity which the occasional local crime, fire, or other calamity invariably unleashed throughout the metropolitan press. Quite early in its program, the Center accepted the responsibility of assisting the Council's publication of a monthly newspaper, the **Central Brooklyn Coordinator.** This publication combines news about various community efforts with factual discussions of all new developments in housing, planning, and urban renewal at all levels. That this kind of information is of interest to the community is proven by the fact that the Coordinator's circulation now exceeds 10,000 copies.

---

*The Corporation's purposes, as contained in its Certificate of Incorporation, are as follows:

(a) To promote, assist and participate, alone and with others and in every way, in the physical rehabilitation and redevelopment of Bedford-Stuyvesant.

(b) To develop an overall plan and such subsidiary plans as may be necessary or convenient to coordinate or assist such physical rehabilitation and redevelopment, taking into account the economic and social needs of Bedford-Stuyvesant as they relate to (without limitation) the rehabilitation of existing structures, all other housing and urban renewal programs, and the availability of adequate mass transportation, adequate schools, parks and community facilities of all kinds.

(c) To provide assistance of all kinds, including (without limitation) the rendering of advice, technical services and financial aid in connection with securing private and government aid or assistance, to individuals, associations, corporations and organizations of all kinds, organizations of all kinds, organized for profit or otherwise, interested in or working for the physical rehabilitation and redevelopment of all or any part of Bedford-Stuyvesant, and to encourage the formation of such organizations.

(d) To assist and cooperate in every way with federal, state and local departments, agencies and organizations of government of any kind in furtherance of the purposes of the Corporation and to the end that Bedford-Stuyvesant shall receive the maximum possible benefit from federal, state and local aid and other programs related to physical rehabilitation and redevelopment.

(e) To cooperate with other private organizations and government agencies in ameliorating and eliminating undesirable economic and social conditions in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

(f) To use whatever methods it deems appropriate and advisable to further the foregoing purposes including, without limitation, conducting, alone or with others, demonstration projects involving the acquisition, construction and rehabilitation of land, buildings and improvements, and such stores, offices, social, communal or other non-housing facilities incidental to such project.

** The new program was announced by Senator Kennedy at the Third Annual Conference of the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, which was co-sponsored by the Pratt Center for Community Improvement and Community Planning Board No. 6. Full support for the Bedford-Stuyvesant program was pledged by Senator Jacob K. Javits and Mayor John V. Lindsay, who were also present, and by Governor Nelson Rockefeller. (See "If Men Do Not Build, How Shall They Live?" elsewhere in this issue).

In addition to its collaboration with community groups, the Center is also conducting a continuing program of information services. Among its publications, which constitute a major portion of its program, is the 300-page **Pratt Planning, Housing, and Urban Renewal Guide for New Yorkers,**—the first comprehensive effort ever made in New York City to list and explain the purposes and complex procedures of the numerous City agencies which play a role in determining the nature of its development. The book was an overwhelming success, and is presently out of print. (A revised edition is planned for publication after the ongoing reorganization of New York City's government is completed and after its new procedures will have become established). A companion publication is the **Community Information Manual** (Central Brooklyn Edition), now in its third printing. This publication offers local residents a complete directory of social, educational, employment and other services available to them in their neighborhoods, and information on how they can best avail themselves thereof. Other publications include **Pratt Planning Papers,** a quarterly review with nationwide circulation; **Social Planning: A Primer for Urbanists,** by Elizabeth Wood; **Parks in New York City's Future: Proceedings of the Third Annual Pratt Planning Conference;** and **Artists in Metropolis,** by Hall Winslow. The Center also publishes frequent **Community Information Bulletins,** a newsletter service intended to achieve more rapid distribution of information on developments in housing, planning, and renewal than does the Coordinator, and which is mailed directly to community groups. This bulletin enables local groups to mobilize while issues are still subject to grass roots influence, and thus to take part in the decision making phases of program development.

In addition, each year the Center organizes a city-wide conference on a timely major topic. Conference themes have included a discussion of the role of the State in the reallocation of powers as between central cities and their suburbs in metropolitan areas;* a discussion of the need for decentralization of New York City's massive bureaucracy in the interest of greater responsiveness to human needs;** a discussion of the future of the City's parks; and a discussion of the relationship of planning to action in New York City's government. All four conferences had a measurable impact on the course of events in the areas they covered.

Lessons Learned

What conclusions, if any, can be reached at the end of nearly four years of activity and an expenditure of about $185,000 by the Pratt Center for Community Improvement? The only *truly significant* measure of the results of such a program is, of course, the extent to which things eventually happen differently from the way in which they would were it not for its existence, and the extent to which the lives of the people in what is now generally termed the "target areas" will have been improved thereby. No such "net impact" evaluation is possible, however, since the program has operated in a dynamic context, where it always was only one force among many which affected the course of events. It would therefore be most difficult, if not totally impossible, to isolate those occurrences for which it was directly responsible or which it modified from those that would have happened anyway. Nor would it be realistic to quantify its effects in any way which would make it possible to subject the effort to a cost-benefit evaluation of its worth.

The latter point is illustrated best by the Center's vest-pocket park program. The principal value of the two small vest-pocket parks which were actually built lies not primarily in their

---

*The position advanced by the Center in 1963 was not unlike that advocated in a recently published report of the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations—See George M. Raymond, "Can Metropolitan Planning Solve the Metropolitan Crisis?", Pratt Planning Papers, Vol. 2, No. 1, April, 1963).

**The position advanced by the Center in 1964 was similar to that advocated in Edward J. Logue's recent report ("Let There be Commitment") to Mayor John V. Lindsay on the reorganization of the City's housing, planning, and development functions—See Editorial in Pratt Planning Papers, Vol. 3, No. 2, November, 1964.

benefit to the children whom they serve—although, in an area as totally deprived of open space, that too is immeasurable. Rather, their chief benefit lies in the impact which the successful involvement of the community organizations concerned had on their morale and will to continue their struggle for broad community improvement programs. These, and other limited successes helped hold the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council's leadership together through many months of frustration and a long and seemingly hopeless process of trying to interest the City's decision-makers in the future of Bedford-Stuyvesant. A few concrete accomplishments along the way were essential to its ability to continue to function and to receive the support of its constituent organizations.

The principal product of the Center's program is the incontestable fact that, of all of New York's ghetto areas, Bedford-Stuyvesant is now generally recognized as being the one most ready to receive a "Model Cities" program. In his report on the need for reorganization of the City's housing, planning, and renewal functions, Edward J. Logue cited the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council as a model of responsible citizen participation, and credited its activities with achieving the impressive political support for the launching of meaningful action programs which currently exists. The recent establishment in Bedford-Stuyvesant of the country's first community-based and locally controlled non-profit Development Corporation, and the commitment to its success of such eminent figures as Senators Robert F. Kennedy and Jacob K. Javits, Mayor John V. Lindsay, and some of the top leaders of America's business community can be directly traced to the quiet spadework done over many frustrating months by the staff of the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council with the Center's active assistance.

Among the other useful lessons are the following:

1. **Constancy of Purpose**

   Such success as the Center may have had is due primarily to its early adoption of specific broad-ranging and exciting, yet entirely attainable, goals and to its unflinching championing of these same goals despite the ever present temptation to "settle for less and get going". Its uncompromising assertion that nothing but a total renewal and rehabilitation effort can possibly make any difference in the future course of the community's life protected it against the wastage of civic energies which normally follows the attainment of limited goals. Thus, much effort may be expended on the forging of a group actively interested in the development of, say, a local swimming pool. Unless this limited objective is a part of a larger objective, upon its realization the original group falls apart, and any new effort for a new school or park, or housing improvement must be laboriously mounted from scratch. The community's concentration on the broad objective of overall renewal not only did not interfere with, but actually helped the community get a designation of the Fulton Park area as suitable for urban renewal. This demonstrates the effectiveness of community concentration on specific objectives under the general umbrella of a comprehensive improvement program.

2. **Comprehensiveness of Goals**

   In ghetto areas, the purposes of any urban extension program must include the creation of an institutional and governmental framework within which the community's problems can be ultimately solved. By definition, therefore, the effort must be exerted on the broadest possible plane toward the achievement of the fullest possible spectrum of objectives. Any effort which concentrates on a single objective — be it the creation of employment opportunities, or more welfare assistance, or training, or housing — is doomed to fall short of the community's real needs. Pursuit of the objective of rebuilding and rehabilitating the entire community will of necessity con-

front the City's government and its entire body politic with the need to address themselves to the solution of all the other problems as well. This has been the lesson taught by urban renewal, which is generally recognized to have made the greatest contribution to the uncovering of our cities' social ills, and to have forced society to come to grips with them.

3. Resistance to Contractual Relationships

The Center resisted the temptation to follow the example of many foundation-funded urban extension programs, as well as that of various institutes of urban studies, which have attempted to assure continuity of financial support by establishing contractual consultant relationships with local governments. This possible alternative was carefully investigated and was rejected on several compelling grounds. Perhaps the most important of these was the fear that, had the Center permitted a situation to arise where the tenure of its staff would become dependent upon its ability to get more contracts, its character would have had to change to the point where it would have become indistinguishable from a private consultant organization. Based on the confirmation offered by so many extant examples all over the country, nothing would more surely have destroyed the Center's flexibility and ability to innovate than the need to generate paid work.

4. Concentration on Operational, as Against Basic, Research

Nor did the Center find it desirable to engage in extensive research. From the very outset it adopted a position which the University of California (Berkeley) Urban Extension program adopted only after a four-year long experiment.* Any needed major research can be secured, under contract, from existing agencies already having the necessary capability. The center rejected decisively the temptation to join the rapidly proliferating research-oriented public and quasi-public programs all over the country which so frequently waste enormous amounts of scarce funds on seemingly endless, inapplicable, untestable, and totally useless projects.

The Center was also acutely aware that an action-and service-oriented staff, in the establishment of which it was primarily interested, does not, generally, also constitute a good research staff. The Center itself had the capability of conducting such small operational research projects as it was in a position to undertake. Examples of such problem-solving oriented research are the already mentioned survey of the Stuyvesant Heights area (which was responsible for the Center's initial involvement with the real issues confronting the community) the inventory of vacant lands and buildings and city-owned lands, availability of insurance coverage, prevalence of liquor stores, etc.

5. Rate of Progress

The pace of any program of involvement with local groups cannot be forced — it must be allowed to unfold and grow at its own rate. Normally, this would be the rate at which local groups grasp the totality of the issues confronting them, and can tighten their understanding of the institutional setting in which their problems will have to be solved, and of the true nature of all available tools. The rate of growth

---

*In a 1965 report to its supporting foundation, the university wrote as follows:
"The university's basic research is not translated into operational form for government agencies, and research needs of the agencies are not posed in researchable form to the community of scholars in the university . . . The absence of such a linkage has been noticed by many thoughtful scholars. And while the university has many research-oriented centers and institutes, these tend to support the faculty's interest in basic research. Thus, the type of applied research which extension could provide would not conflict with these organizations but, rather, would complement their work and improve the communication between them and the community and its agencies." ("Urban Extension", op. cit.)

of the program will also inevitably depend upon the trust of grass-roots organizations in their technical advisors. To develop such understanding and trust it is essential that technicians should never presume to speak for local agencies. No matter how frustrating, at times, the process may become, local spokesmen must be allowed to speak for themselves. Given a thorough educational program in the background, the Center's experience suggests that it should be possible to develop a substantial body of well-informed opinion in almost any long-established ghetto community in a short time. (The same may of course not be true of concentrations of minority residents with deep seated problems).

Any attempt to force the relationship between residents and advisors or to have the technicians assume the leadership in relations between the local area and the City, is bound to end with the technicians way out front, shouting and shoving, but with no one behind them.

6. **Community Organization**

The Center also resisted the temptation of "adopting", for long periods of time, leaderless indigenous groups, in the hope that their constant association with technicians would increase their effectiveness to a degree sufficient to enable them to stand on their own feet. This function, it was felt, is primarily one of community organization, which is being discharged well by the able staff of the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council and other established local organizations. The Center's policy is to deal only with responsible leaders of all bona-fide local organizations. Whether within the ghetto or outside, there can be no organization and no effective action without leaders, and it is axiomatic that well informed leaders can lead more effectively, and thereby strengthen the influence of their organizations vis-a-vis the rest of the world, and their own influence within their organizations. The emergence of strong leaders, democratically elected and responsive to their constituencies, is essential to the achievement of social stability; and social stability, in turn, is indispensable to the eventual constructive unfolding of the needed massive community-wide improvement program, particularly when it is realized that, of necessity, such a program will have to develop over a long period of time.

7. **Funding**

If a program is to grow at all under the circumstances described above, it is essential that its funding not dry up just at the moment when some of its major efforts are about to bear fruit. Unfortunately, most programs funded by foundations feel that their continued support depends upon their ability to produce quick headline-making results. On the contrary, the experience of the Pratt Center for Community Improvement proves the desirability of careful and deliberate program development. For best results, it would thus seem that the purposes of a grant should be spelled out as flexibly as possible, with the rate of expenditure left entirely up to its administrators. To be specific, in round figures the Pratt program cost only $10,000 in its first year, $30,000 in its second, $65,000 in its third, and $80,000 in its fourth year (the last two years' budgets included $30,000 for the development of the two vest-pocket parks and $10,000 for a Leadership Training Program for which a special grant was obtained by the Center under the terms of Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965). Had its staff felt under pressure to spend as much as one-third of its initial $94,000 three-year funding during the first year, it might have generated a headline or two, but most of the expended funds would have been wasted, and any base for future operations so hurriedly established would have been much less effective.

8. Role in Community Conflict

The Center's staff also carefully evaluated the pros and cons of direct engagement in community conflict, and it concluded that its role should be strictly limited to that of technicians, instructors, and staff assistants to responsible local groups. The most useful product of its activities should be the achievement of an equality of knowledge between local leaders and City representatives in regard to all issues under discussion. It is only when in possession of such knowledge that local people can engage successfully in direct confrontations with the bureaucracy and elected officialdom across a negotiating table rather than in the streets. In most instances, direct grassroots action is not centered on complex issues — it doesn't take great housing expertise to enable one to bring dead rats to City Hall and dump them on the Mayor's desk! Since technical advice in such cases would have been superfluous, direct involvement by the staff of the Center in such activities would have been frankly political. In this connection it is important to note that it is precisely the Center's ability to maintain a totally non-partisan, non-political stance throughout its four year existence that invested it with such effectiveness as it may possess.

9. Political Neutrality

This latter statement should not be interpreted to mean that the Center is oblivious to the political implications of its program, actions, pronouncements, and advice. On the contrary, without being in any way partisan, the timing of every one of its moves was carefully weighed in relation to the prevailing political situation, and to its possible impact on events. Thus, the second annual community-wide conference of the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council on the subject of Housing and Urban Renewal was scheduled for the Saturday before the 1965 New York mayoralty contest, which was held the following Tuesday. As usual, the polls had forecast victory by both sides, but all agreed that the victory margin would be small, and that the minority vote would count very heavily in the balance. The prospect of addressing an assembly of some 600-700 vocal and reasonably aroused community leaders in a key area was seized by a number of political leaders of both parties and it can truthfully be said that this conference was the starting point of the upward curve in Bedford-Stuyvesant's destiny.

10. Improved Communication

One of the most useful observations developed by the Center is that, in many cases, the lack of responsiveness on the part of the governmental bureaucracy to legitimate demands from the grass roots is due to the fact that these demands are not presented in language which the bureaucrats are capable of understanding. The administration of the increasingly more complex municipal programs is so bound up with statutory requirements and administrative regulations (not to speak of the ever-present political considerations) that, unless the demands are presented in a way which will show the respondent how he can justify their being granted, he will tend to deny them. One of the Center's principal contributions in this regard was its ability to assist the community to state its case cogently and effectively, and thereby to establish that minimal level of communication with the bureaucracy which is indispensable to constructive interaction.

11. The Center and the Institute

The final observations regarding the Pratt Center for Community Improvement deal with its position within the Institute and its relationship to the other departments. The Center is lodged within the Department of City and Regional Planning, an almost

autonomous part of the School of Archictecture. Its position in the Institute is not the result of any careful premeditation; rather, it is a reflection of the fact that the people with the relevant kind of motivation, and who therefore took the initiative toward its establishment, happened to be connected with that Department. The motivation of the administrators of a heavily service-oriented program, such as any kind of urban extension work must be if it is to have any meaning, is clearly crucial to its success. The theoretical "correctness" of its location within the university structure would seem to be entirely secondary.

Secondly, the Center's freedom of any entangling urban ideologies enabled its staff to move rapidly and flexibly, and thus capitalize on all opportunities as they arose. In socially dynamic times, institutions, no less than men, must be able to take tides in their affairs "at the flood", if, to paraphrase the poet, all the voyage of their remaining lives is not to be bound in "shallows and in miseries". This the Center, within the severe limitations of its resources, was able to do.

Thirdly, the Center's impact upon the university is of less consequence than its ability to draw upon it for assistance. Pratt Institute does not have a full complement of university offerings, but to the extent that relevant programs do exist in other departments, the Center has been able to secure their total cooperation. The Center's activities have been aided by members of the Pratt Youth Corps (organized under the auspices of Professor Joseph Garai, of the School of Humanities and Social Science) and it has had a close relationship with the Department of Design in the School of Architecture. The Art School has contributed volunteers who have worked in tutorial and arts and crafts programs, painted murals in the two vest-pocket parks, etc. The Department of Interior Design has developed a proposal for the furnishing of low-rent apartments with tasteful furnishings within the means of low-income families. And, above all, the President's office has been most helpful at all times. In the few instances in which the Center found lack of interest in anything other than scholarship, research, or professional association, it turned for assistance to where the need for action is recognized along with the usefulness of the traditional academic concerns.

The presence of the Center in the Department of City and Regional Planning has strengthened the Department's original determination to attempt to produce action-oriented professionals, eager to do battle on whatever front their presence will contribute to the development of an environment in which the Nation's urban masses will be more likely to live the good life than they are able to now. Increasingly, students have devoted time to Center-related projects.* In the future, it is expected that such work will become required of all students. Given adequate resources, the Department also hopes to initiate a Community Development orientation to supplement its traditional Master of Urban Planning degree program, and to seek out students among Negro and Puerto Rican college graduates who, by reason of discrimination or lack of self-confidence, are employed in positions which fail to develop their full ability. Trained in community development, housing, planning, and urban renewal theory and techniques, they will hopefully be able to assume key leadership roles in the total rebuilding and rehabilitation of their ghetto communities — a goal to which the Pratt Center for Community Improvement is single-mindedly dedicated.

ERIC Clearinghouse

MAR 26 1969

on Adult Education

*Significant renewal studies were developed for Coney Island and Flatbush. The latter was in large measure responsible for the establishment of the Flatbush Community Council.